

The Animals' Lawsuit Against Humanity

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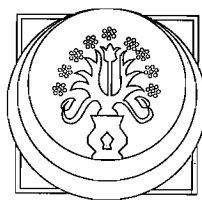
A Modern Adaptation of an Ancient Animal Rights Story

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FONS VITAE

The Animals' Lawsuit Against Humanity

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DEDICATIONS

To my wife, Merrily, for all her love and support;
and to my children, Miriam, Anna, and Amy,
and my children's children, for they shall inherit the earth.

Anson Laytner

To my sons, Jacob and Zachary, who teach me daily wonders
of creation.

Dan Bridge

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Janine Skolnik Benton, Shoshanna Brown, Martha Kongsgaard, Lindy Orlin, Carole Hosford, Elizabeth Wales, and Claire Vardiel Zaslove.

PREFACE

A Note to the Reader about this Tale

How often does one come across a thousand-year old "animal rights" tale, written first in Arabic by Muslims, then translated into Hebrew by a Jew at the request of a medieval Christian king, and now translated into English and adapted by two Jews and a Christian, and illustrated by a Muslim lady from Pakistan in the employ of a Saudi princess? Read on...

I

The volume itself was a small Hebrew paperback, printed on cheap, browning newsprint, and published in Jerusalem under the title *Iggeret Baalei Hayyim* (*The Letter of the Animals*) by Mosad HaRav Kook in 1949. I happened upon it some twenty years ago while wandering the stacks in the library of the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati where I was doing research for my rabbinic thesis/book *Arguing with God: A Jewish Tradition*. At the time, all I knew was that the story involved a dispute between people and animals at the Court of the King of the Spirits over humanity's alleged abuse of these creatures. Although it was beyond the scope of my then-current work, I was nonetheless fascinated by the timeliness of its plot and its multi-faith authorship.

So I photocopied the small paperback, filed it away, and took it with me when I graduated. It traveled with me to Larchmont, New York, and later, to Seattle, Washington, where it sat untouched for twelve years. In the due course of time, my friend and colleague, Dan Bridge, and I decided to become study partners in order to deepen our Hebrew skills and Jewish knowledge. Only then did I recall the story that I had filed away so long before. Thus it was, on almost every Friday morning, for nearly two years, we would meet to translate a portion of *Iggeret Baalei Hayyim* (*The Letter of the Animals*). During the week, I would enter our work on the computer. Much later, when we had finished translating, we began to polish and edit, to revise and rewrite. Still later, I continued adapting the

work on my own, receiving advice from many individuals who were interested in seeing the story published. When I began to seek a publisher for the tale, a friend suggested Fons Vitae because of its focus on spiritual texts and inter-faith dialogue. The publisher, Gray Henry, is a Kentuckian and something of a free spirit with a great love of Islamic mysticism. She became as enthusiastic as I was about the tale's lesson and its history. Both were important messages for our day and age. Gray asked Matthew Kaufmann, a Christian and then a student at Bellarmine University, to do a final edit of the tale and to add additional color and texture to the story.

II

Our work marks the first time that the Hebrew edition has been translated into English, albeit in a more readable and dramatic form. But that too is in keeping with its history. In actuality, the antecedents of the story were Indian, but the first written version of the story was penned in Arabic by members of the Islamic "Order of the Pure Brethren", a Sufi order, in the environs of Basra, Iraq, sometime during the tenth century of the Common Era. In their version, the story was the twenty-fifth of fifty-one "letters", or treatises, comprising an encyclopedia, which described the mysteries and meaning of life.

Much later, this one story, *The Letter of the Animals*, was translated and adapted (in seven days, no less!) by Rabbi Kalonymus ben (son of) Kalonymus, known among Christians as Maestro Calo, at the request of his master, King Charles of Anjou (in France), in the year 1316 of the Common Era. Even Kalonymus' telling of the tale apparently exists in several widely differing versions—compare the Hebrew text upon which this story is based with the version cited by Morris Epstein in his introductory essay to *Mishle Sendebār*, (*The Tales of Sendebār*), (Jewish Publication Society, 1967), in which the case is argued before the King of the Birds, not the King of the Spirits. The story was popular in European Jewish communities into the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Besides being published in Hebrew, it also was translated into Yiddish, German and Spanish.

As a story type, this work bears similarities to the 12th century Sufi fable *The Conference of the Birds*, by Farid ud-Din Attar. Indeed, in the version cited by Epstein in his introduction to *Mishle Sendebār*, the beasts take their complaint before the sovereign of the birds. Comparable stories from other cultures include the 18th century Japanese philosophical satire *The Animal Court* by Ando Shoeki and *The Animals' Conference* by Erich Kastner, a post World War II fable about making peace "for children and other understanding people".

III

The tale as we present it is but a highly adapted fraction of the original whole, the ingenious kernel that first caught my fancy. The original tale itself is much longer, with numerous philosophical and theological digressions, and tales within tales. We found it necessary to sacrifice a number of these in order to highlight the essential story. In our version, we gave the characters symbolic names and a touch of personality, whereas in the original the humans, in particular, were nameless and generally offensive ethnic stereotypes—and all male besides!

We also decided to significantly embellish the ending by giving the King a major speech before he announces his verdict and by dramatically heightening the importance of his judgment for our own time. Even so, we believe our ending remains true to the intent of Kalonymus' version. We also chose, in a moment of multi-faith whimsy, to base King Bersaf's final speech on passages from the *Tao Te Ching*. As in the Hebrew version of the tale, our story concludes with a poem that recapitulates the broad outlines of the story. However, for our version, I chose to write my own poem rather than simply translate the original.

A word about "spirits". The Jerusalem Talmud divides these variously named beings into three types: *mazzikim* (harmful spirits), *shedim* (good or bad spirits) and *ruhot* (spirits which can possess a person). In the Babylonian Talmud—from the country in which this story originated—the world was thought to be filled with all sorts of spirits. "If the eye could see them, no one could endure the spirits (*mazzikim*)...They are more numerous than we are and they surround us...Every person has a thousand on his left and ten thousand on his right..." (Berachot 6a). The Ramban (Nachmanides),

a 13th century Spanish rabbi, scholar and mystic, claimed that spirits were not created out of the four elements, but rather only from fire and air, allowing them to fly through air. However, like human beings, they were subject to both life and death, even though their longevity was greater. In our story, the word we translate as "spirits" is *shedim*. We could have translated them as "demons" but that seemed too prejudicial a term, given the negative connotations the word has in English. We also considered substituting the Arabic word *djinn* as in "genie" for "spirit" or "demon" but, thanks to Aladdin—and Disney—that is an equally loaded word. The important point to remember is that whether called "spirits", "demons", *djinn*, or "genie", these beings are benevolent, wise and devout.

At the conclusion of the tale, I have added a short essay on the spiritual value of treating animals—and indeed all of Creation—lovingly and with compassion. I have also included a smattering of quotes from Jewish traditions supporting the importance of this principle—in case the objective evidence of the decline of our natural world needs any reinforcement.

At any rate, we hope you will forgive our *chutzpah* for making the changes we have made, but it is our hope that, by bringing a "lost classic" to a new generation in a new land, our retelling of this story both will rescue a wonderful tale from obscurity and at the same time invigorate our collective efforts at *tikkun olam*, the repair of the world.

Anson Laytner
Tu b'Shevat 5765
25 January, 2005

May the multi-faith coöperation that informed the transmission of this tale and the publishing of this version of it inspire people of faith everywhere—and in the Middle East in particular—to overcome their theological differences and recognize their overwhelming similarities in order to work together for the common good of humankind and other living creatures.

This volume is dedicated to the hope that the time will come when we humans treat all sentient beings with compassion and respect.

INTRODUCTION

In the mid 1950's when writing my doctoral thesis at Harvard on Islamic concepts of nature and cosmology in the 4th / 10th century, I decided to devote the first part of the work to the *Epistles (Rasa'il)* of the Ikhwan al-Safa' or the Brethren of Purity. While going over the Arabic text I was struck at the same time by the beauty and the timeliness and contemporary significance of the treatise on the dispute between man and the animals in part two of the *Rasa'il*, a treatise dealing with the complaints of animals to the king of the *jinn* because of their mistreatment at the hands of the children of Adam. The message of the story appeared to me to be particularly timely because even then there was a keen intuition in my mind concerning the impending crisis in man's relation with nature, a subject to which I turned a decade later in my *Man and Nature*, written at the dawn of general awareness of what came to be known as the ecological and later environmental crisis. My thesis appeared in print in 1964 as *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* and this work turned the attention of a number of scholars to the story of the dispute between man and the animals.

The story had been generally neglected in twentieth century Western scholarship although it was translated by J. Platts into English in the nineteenth century as *Dispute between Man and the Animals* and by F. Dieterici into German as part of his translation of the *Rasa'il*. One of the scholars whose attention was turned to this story as a result of reading my book on Islamic cosmology was Lynn Goodman who then translated the text into English again as *The Case of Animals versus Man Before the King of Jinn*. There is also a contemporary German translation of the story entitled *Mensch und Tiervor den König der Dschinnen* by A. Giese.

The destiny of this work during the Middle Ages remained, however, neglected. It is interesting to note that this work was very popular in its Hebrew version among Jewish scholars who played such an important role in the transmission of Islamic learning in the Middle Ages to the Latin West. It is perhaps even more interesting to note that this story was translated into Latin for a Christian king

Introduction

in France, Charles of Anjou, by a Jewish scholar. Like so much of the philosophy and science of the medieval period in Spain, this remarkable tale bears the mark of an Abrahamic cooperation, one in whose creation and propagation Muslims, Jews and Christians participated. It is, therefore, a doubly significant work as far as the contemporary world is concerned, for it is first of all concerned with man's relation to animals and more generally to the natural environment, and secondly it is rooted in an ecumenical perspective which permitted the Islamic treatment of the subject to be also adopted and appreciated by Jewish and Christian scholars and more general readers.

The essential message of this wonderful tales negates completely that concept of man based on hubris and pride which enables modern human beings to utilize, dominate and destroy other species always with the pretext of fulfilling so-called human needs, making the rights of man over other creatures absolute. Needless to say this egocentrism and hubris have always existed but it became especially emphasized in the West with Renaissance humanism and the idealization what I have elsewhere called Promethean man. What is most significant in this treatise is that all the arguments bought up by man to justify his domination and abuse of animals are countered and negated by various animals as they defend their case before the king of the *jinn*. There remains but one reason for man's superiority that the animals cannot refute and that is the possibility of a number among men to attain sanctity and therefore to be able to act as the channel of the grace for the rest of God's creation. But to fulfill this function of being truly the vice-regent of God on earth (*Khalifat Allah fi'l-ard*), as the Quran describes the function of the human being here on earth, means to overcome that very hubris and self-aggrandizement which are the source of abuse of the rest of God's creation and about which the animals were complaining before the king of the *jinn* in the first place.

This story, although a thousand years old, brings up issues of the greatest contemporary significance as far as the environmental crisis is concerned. What are our rights over other creatures and what are the limits of their rights? What about the rights of animals? What is the goal of human life and what is our role vis-à-vis the rest of God's creation while we seek to attain that goal? These

are questions of momentous import at a time when human beings have adopted modes of living totally out of harmony with the natural environment and a way of life based on complete disregard for the life of other creatures, a way of life which has made modern human beings an endangering and at the same time an endangered species.

This story can be an important source for the formulation of a contemporary Islamic environmental philosophy, a philosophy whose expression in current language is a dire necessity for the Islamic world, which, like other parts of the world, is suffering from serious environmental problems. But this story can also provide food for thought for Jewish and Christian thinkers involved in environmental issues and the formulation of Jewish and Christian theologies of nature and environmental philosophies. Moreover, the history of this tale, written in Iraq by Muslims, translated into Hebrew by Jews, and rendered into Latin for a Christian king—not to speak of joint “Abrahamic” coöperation in the preparation of the present book—remind us of the basic truth that the most crucial problems of today are those which all authentic religious people face together. How much better it would be for all humanity if, rather than facing each other in contention, the religions would live in harmony and join their resources in facing the excruciating problems of the day—among the most important being the environmental crisis—problems that threaten earthly human existence itself?

Fons Vitae is to be congratulated in making this work in its current form, which reflects directly the coöperation of representatives from all of the religions of the Abrahamic family, available in the English language. They have provided a book of value for experts on medieval thought as well as ordinary readers interested in reading a fascinating story of enduring spiritual worth and great current significance.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr
November, 2004
Ramadan, 1425 (A.H.)

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LIST OF MAJOR CHARACTERS

Humans

Ahzar (Cruelty)
Ga'avah (Pride)
Hasad (Jealousy)
Hochmah (Wisdom)
Ka'as (Anger)
Kasal (Sloth)
Shabakah (Lust)
Shara (Gluttony)
Tama (Greed)
Tawadu (Humility)
Unf (Violence)
Zadone (Malice)

Animals

Camel
Cow
Cricket
Donkey
Dragon
Elephant
Frog
Horse
Mule
Nightingale
Ox
Parrot
Pig
Queen Bee
Sheep

Spirits

Bersaf (King of the Spirits)
Peruz (Advisor to the King)

GATE ONE

The enslavement of the beasts by the humans and
how the beasts brought suit against humanity in the
Court of Bersaf, King of the Spirits

I

Long, long ago, there was a place on earth where the animals lived alone, free from persecution by human beings. That was the island of Tsagone, in the middle of the Green Sea, right on the heart of the equator. The island was in the Kingdom of the Spirits, and it was an enchanted isle, ruled by Bersaf, King of the Spirits. No human has ever visited this island, either before or after the story you are about to hear.

Tsagone was a magical place, alive with various trees and fruits, grasses, seeds and flowers. The air was moist with gentle fragrance—not a single scent or spice was missing. All the different species of animals dwelled there, those with cloven hooves and those without; a seemingly endless spectrum of birds; animals of prey and beasts of the field; and every kind of flying and creeping insect. All lived together in peace: the wolf and the lamb, the tiger and the goat, the cow and the bear, the eagle and the turtle dove. The wild donkey, the deer, the antelope, and the birds of prey, together with those they now eat, all lived together in happiness and contentment; their young danced in joy before them. They knew nothing of fear, and were fortunate enough not learn of violence or greed. There was no hostility or trouble—no grudges, no hatred, no enmity—only peace and neighborliness, love and common-animality.

One day, a large wooden ship happened to be traveling in the Green Sea *en route* to Massah. On board were people of every faith and custom, representing each of the seventy nations of the world: men and women; merchants and knights; artisans and artists; storekeepers and doctors; farmers and seekers of wisdom. A terrible storm



One day, a large wooden ship happened to be traveling in the Green Sea en route to Massah. On board were people of every faith and custom, representing each of the seventy nations of the world: men and women; merchants and knights; artisans and artists; storekeepers and doctors; farmers and seekers of wisdom. A terrible storm arose on their journey, as quickly and unexpectedly as death can introduce itself into one's life. The sea would rise and fall, tower and plummet. Unmerciful waters would pound the ship with relentless power. The sailors rowed for their lives, but were unable to prevail against the anger of the sea.

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Once ashore, they turned their eyes to Heaven and gave thanks, in their multitude of ways, for their salvation from the fury of the storm. Then they set out to explore the island. There they saw many kinds of trees and fruits and grasses growing in its fertile soil; they tasted its sweet waters and savored the pleasant evening weather; the colorful flowers alive with beauty and the fragrant spices laced with inspiration filled the peoples' hearts with joy. They also observed all the animals living together in peace and marveled at such a sight.

"We must be the first human beings ever to set foot on this island! Look how unafraid the animals are of us!"

"This is truly paradise," agreed another. "It is by the grace of God that we have landed here safely. We are in the land of innocence!"

"Yes indeed," declared a third, a greedy man by the name of Tama. "Here's a golden opportunity if I ever saw one. We can be kings here! We can rule this place, and make our own way. God blesses us!"

Realizing there was no known method for them to leave the enchanted isle, the people decided to make the best of things. They built houses and planted crops, established a town and set up markets on every corner. But not everyone was content with this situation.

"We work too hard," complained Kasal, stifling a yawn. "Back home, we had servants and slaves to do our bidding. We had animals to plow and animals to carry—who are we going to find here to do all this labor? I thought we were going to be kings."

"Why just sit there and whine?" demanded Zadone, "Let's grab some of these animals and put them to use. Not only can they work for us, but we can eat them to sustain ourselves." Hochmah, a wise woman, replied to Zadone with a tone of reverence in her voice, "But we must be careful not to build our society around the avoidance of hard work and the growling of our stomachs. We have a chance to create a new culture here, one that can truly elevate the quality of life for all of us. We mustn't abuse these animals or we will be abusers. The consequences of such self-centered intentions are inevitable destruction of the life within and around us."

Few ears could understand these words, but a few humble people absorbed them with transforming feelings. Unfortunately, the focus on freedom from labor and the possibility of meat to eat took hold of most of the minds and hearts of the crowd. This focus intoxicated the crowd in a hypnotic desire, and Zadone knew this. He spoke briefly to Hochmah, "We won't be abusers. They won't know the difference—they're nothing but dumb animals. We'll choose the kind of life they live and they'll get used to it!" Zadone then turned to the crowd, "We will have our slaves! We will build our kingdom *our way!*"

The crowd erupted with applause; birds flew from the trees in fear.

"We'll have all the animals we need in no time," declared Ahzar.

"Why should we suffer when they can do so much for us? They are nothing. They are meant for our pleasure," added Unf.

Ahzar stood to his feet yelling to the crowd, "Arm yourselves! The hunt has begun. Grab your weapons, and join us!" The crowd shouted with fever! The floor shook as the men left for the hunt with thirsting enthusiasm. Tiny bugs observed the men with curious expressions of wonder.

Capturing the animals proved easier than they had expected. The animals had never met any humans before and thus had no reason to fear them, no reason to hide, no reason to abandon their state of innocence. The animals looked to the men with eyes alive with trust, and thus they were easily taken advantage of by the humans.

The men captured some of the cloven-hoofed animals—sheep, cattle and camels—and some of the beasts—horses, mules and donkeys—and bound them tightly with rough ropes and put bridles in their mouths, and forced them to work. The people used them for riding, carrying, plowing and pulling heavily laden wagons. Others they took and slaughtered so that they could eat meat once again. The animals watched with fear as their brothers and sisters were slaughtered, cooked, and eaten. The humans treated the animals with great cruelty, pushing them beyond their endurance, just as they had done with animals in their own lands.

At first, the animals did not know what evil had befallen them, but soon they realized their whole way of life had changed for the worse. Eyes that were once filled with trust began to be drowned in stormy oceans of fear. Some animals were able to flee far away, to distant deserts and deep dark valleys, to thick forests and high mountains. But the people pursued them and recaptured most of them. Animals that once walked the earth in freedom began to feel the unexpected pain of sharp metal traps clutching their feet as they walked with trusting steps. Some learned not to walk so trustingly, and were able to survive; others were caught and forced to return to the life into which the humans had compelled them. The ground that once gave them pleasure now rose up and attacked them with new methods of violence. The animals could only wait in pain, submitting to their fate, and returned to their life of slavery.

"You animals are our slaves—How dare you attempt to flee from us!" Ga'avah exclaimed with wounded pride. And Ka'as shouted out in anger: "Ahzar, Unf—show them what we do with rebels." Ahzar stared at the horse with merry, evil eyes. He whipped the horse as the horse whinnied in pain. The horse looked with a searching expression for someone to help him, but the people just laughed and pointed at him. Unf spit in his face. The horse had no choice but to accept the abuse. He lowered his head, and felt the whip that once stung his skin now make his skin numb. The hearts of Ahzar and Unf danced with joy at their savagery.

When the animals still living in freedom learned about the fate of the captives, they gave thanks to their Creator for their survival, and then took secret counsel together in a remote part of the island.

"Running away won't help," Horse neighed, "We tried that but they pursued us and managed to recapture many. Besides, they never give up the chase. We will always be hunted. They don't see us as free living creatures, they see us as slaves and as food."

"It's true," moaned Cow, "And so many of us are injured. They set traps all around us so that we can't even walk without fear. Look at my leg, it won't stop bleeding."

"How can they treat us so cruelly? We have done nothing to them." lowed Ox in despair. "I just want our old life back. I miss my family, I'm afraid I'll never see them again."

"We should ask Bersaf the King of the Spirits for help," suggested Mule. "He is a wise and noble spirit who knows the value of justice."

"Is it possible?" asked Cow.

Mule put his head next to Cow's, "It is if you have faith. We must believe this way of life was not meant for us."

"Justice!" exclaimed Ox. He shouted again and again, "Justice! Justice! We deserve justice!" And the beasts began to chant together. A slow rumble turned into a towering thunder of voices, "Justice! Justice! Justice!" Their hearts began to rise as they felt the solidarity of their purpose; hope began to ascend in their eyes, and they ventured off to the King's Court together.

But none of them had even seen a spirit. And no creature of flesh and blood had ever been to the Spirit King's Court.

Yet they knew the Palace existed, as did the spirit kingdom, as did the spirits themselves. They sensed the spirits, felt their joy and heard their wisdom whispering in the howling winds. They knew of stories that proclaimed spirits taking on physical forms in order to communicate to those living who walked the land.

Mule spoke to his friends, "Let us call to the spirits! Let us call together in one voice! Everyone! Shout with your heart through your lips!"

The animals stood in a circle, facing outwards, and brayed and lowed, bleated and neighed, until the air began to quiver and shimmy. Soon, all around them, changing shapes and visages began to dance, fading in and out before their tearing eyes. In the midst of all this, Bersaf the Wise, King of the Spirits, Ruler of the Island of Tsagone, appeared, flickering first as a being, bug-eyed, bewhiskered and bristling with lightening; then as crackling energy, cat's eyes and canine teeth; and then as a serene face, neither human nor animal, set amid the reds and oranges of a setting sun.

The beasts were filled with awe and dread. They fell on their faces before him, weeping, and told him all that had befallen them. Voices cried out in desperation, and fell silent in unison when Mule explained, "Our lives have been stolen by the violence of these humans! We are the victims of all their anger, ignorance, and laziness! Please help us... We beg for your mercy..."

And King Bersaf the Wise, pure and honest, God-fearing and shunning evil, hospitable to guests, a defender of the poor, merciful toward the unfortunate, a dispenser of gifts and charity, far-removed from oppression, despising iniquity, opposing villainy with great conviction and with great anger—there isn't another like him in all creation!—grew green with inner rage as he heard their sad tale.

"No life should undergo such abuse. These humans have lost sight of the life within you." King Bersaf raised his voice, his eyes beamed with empathy, "I feel your sorrow and your loss... It is an outrage against our Creator that these humans treat you animals so cruelly! I will confront these humans in my court! Justice will be realized!"

II

So the King of the Spirits sent messengers to the people ordering them to come before him to account for the oppression and violence that they were alleged to have done.

The people were distraught. Until then they were in the habit of thinking that they were the lords of all. And now, suddenly, as if awakened from a deep dream, they found themselves accountable

for what they had done and were doing. Immediately they split into two parties. One group was already upset, troubled by the cruelty they had seen done to the innocent animals, and sad to see the island paradise disrupted. They spoke amongst themselves, seemingly random voices arising from the crowd.

"How could we be so unaware of the violence we do?"

"Maybe the king's action will help by forcing us all to realize our better nature?"

"The responsibility for our hearts is ours to see."

But the other group, led by Ga'avah, Ka'as and Zadone, was stronger. Though the two parties argued, in the end the latter group always won—Unf and Ahzar made sure of that with their constant intimidation. Speaking loudly and refusing to listen, they closed their hearts and their minds off from any view that did not support their agendas.

Hochmah, the female sage, spoke amongst all the people: "It makes no sense to have treated the animals so harshly. They were practically tame to begin with. Now your activities have landed us in trouble with the ruler of this realm! I do not want your violence associated with my way of life. I tried to warn you before. Violence is barbaric! And we are capable of so much more. We can live our lives in peace." A number of people nodded their heads in agreement—until Ahzar, Unf and their followers stepped forward, crowding the breath of the people with their angry and disapproving looks.

"Please listen," soothed Zadone slyly with a calming smile, "Perhaps some of us *did* go too far in the beginning, but after all, the situation was desperate when we first came ashore. That was *then*. But this is now—what good will it do for us to present a divided front at the King's Court? We need to stand together or we'll all lose our homes, our farms, everything. The King needs to see that we live in harmony together. We have no other choice."

Intimidated and apparently out-numbered, the wise woman Hochmah and her circle reluctantly agreed to go along with the others, knowing deep down that they forfeited the actions of their un-

derstandings to people with evil intentions. They buried their feelings of responsibility and guilt by convincing themselves that they didn't have a choice.

So they sent seventy chosen people to the King's Court, representing all languages, faiths and nations of the earth, each dressed according to the custom of his or her own land.

They traveled, as commanded, to the very center of the island that was dominated by a single, snow-capped volcano. There, at its summit, partially obscured by dense white clouds and misty steam, rose a palace of red and gold and black. Its surface was so pure and shiny that the light reflected off of the palace's walls nearly blinded many humans. Its columns—so it seemed to them—appeared insubstantial; they quivered and shimmered behind their moist veil of sparkling steam. They wondered how the pillars could hold up the magnificent golden tiled roof. The light seemed to embrace the palace, expanding and contracting from it in a surrounding sphere. It appeared to be breathing. As they drew closer, they were spotted by the King's servants, who announced the arrival of the humans to their Spirit Master.

When the humans were ushered into the audience hall, King Bersaf chose to appear as the serene, red-orange face of the sun-being; then as crackling energy, flashing cat's eyes and snarling canine teeth; and lastly as a glaring, bug-eyed and bewhiskered monster bristling with lightening.

As anticipated, the human delegation stopped dead in its tracks when it saw this fearsome display. Huddling together, they advanced slowly until they stood before this presence and, bowing low, they declaimed together in a loud voice the words they had rehearsed: "May our Lord the King live long; may his years be good and his days pleasant! We are very pleased to be invited here before him."

But the King was not pleased. He demanded an explanation from them: "Why have you seized and oppressed these pitiful beasts? Why do you abuse them? Have you no respect for life?!" His voice

reverberated through the palace, echoing throughout the land. The ground beneath the humans' feet trembled, and they recognized fear in each others' eyes.

Zadone, the spokesperson for the people, centered himself and stood to confront the task before him. He looked downcast as if to suggest that it pained him more than it did the animals to treat them so badly. He replied with careful words, "The truth is, my Lord and King, that these and all other animals are our slaves and that we are their masters. We own them. But some of these animals rebelled against us and fled from their work. That cannot be allowed, as I'm sure you can understand, my Lord. So we pursued them, recaptured those we could and disciplined them. There's really nothing more to it than that, Your Highness. As you know, a society without some form of discipline is one of chaos, and we endeavor to live a life within order. So, wise King, please judge between us and these, our slaves, who have sinned by rebelling against us. May God direct your noble heart in the path of truth and justice."

As he spoke, the King gradually was mollified. When Zadone finished, the King was inclined to listen to both sides and inquired: "What evidence do you have that they are your slaves?"

Ga'avah, a pretty woman, strode proudly forward and declared in a voice rich with reading: "God raised us human beings over all other creatures and gave us the animals and other foods to eat, as God said to Adam and Eve: 'Fill the earth and master it, rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky and all the living things that creep on earth.' And God also said to Noah: 'The fear and the dread of you shall be upon all the beasts of the earth and upon all the birds of the sky and every creature that lives shall be yours to eat.' All this proves that God created animals solely for our use. They are our slaves and we are their masters. Justice is on our side."

The King turned to the animals and asked: "Do you have an answer to this human's words?"

Mule arose and said: "My Lord, I will refute her words. This human has not offered a single proof to support the notion that they are our masters and we are their slaves. God created humans from

dust and ashes and put them on earth to dwell on it, but not to destroy it; to coexist with us, the other living creatures, and to obtain benefit from us, but not to oppress us—and certainly not to kill us!

The sun and moon, the clouds and the wind also give humans benefit. Does this mean that they too are humanity's servants? Animals provide benefit to the humans and help them in many ways, that's true; but it was never the Creator's intent that the humans be our masters and we their slaves, or that they should treat us so cruelly. To think this way is the height of pride!"

Donkey spoke up: "Our Lord and King, our ancestors dwelt in this land even before Adam and Eve were created. We dwelled in all its corners and roamed freely, busying ourselves with raising our young and providing food for them. Then these humans arrived on this island and they began to make our lives miserable, forcing us from our dwellings and dragging us into captivity and hard labor. Finally, those who could, fled as far away as possible in order to escape the merciless rule of the humans.

"But even there these humans pursued us. There is no end to their violence! They beat us, whip us, slaughter us, flay and chop us up. They pluck our feathers, and they shear our hair and wool. Then, after this, they boil us in pots or roast us on spits. Now I do not see any proof in this that they are our superiors; only that might makes right. Let our Lord and King judge between us. Justice is on our side."

The King again turned to Zadone, the human representative: "What do you have to say about the violence and the injustices which the animals say you have perpetrated against them?"

Zadone replied, "We say that they are our slaves and we shall seize those whom we wish and treat them just as we would treat any other possession. Those who submit to us accept the notion that the Creator set us to rule over them—but those who break our yoke and flee—they are rebelling against God's word. The choice and the consequences are theirs."

The King asked: "But what real proof do you have that the Creator intended you to rule in this cruel way over all other living creatures?"

Ga'avah strode to the front once again and proudly answered: "Consider the beauty of our form—how our bodies stand upright, how fine our senses are, and how high is our level of knowledge. Consider also the purity of our being—we alone have souls, consciences and understanding. All these are found in us, but not in them. This proves the fact that our Creator intended us to be their masters and they to serve us as we demand."

The King turned to his Court, "These humans do have beautiful forms. Their upright bodies do seem to testify to a royal design. The animals, on the other hand, whose spines are horizontal and who walk on all fours, do appear to bear the submissive form of slaves."

III

No sooner had the King uttered these words then Mule bent his head low in shame. He hesitated in his embarrassment, then replied: "O noble and upright King, may God direct you in what is proper and keep you far from error and ignorance. Please incline your ear and listen to what I say."

The Creator did not create humanity in an upright form as proof that they are lords. Nor did the Creator make our bodies bent over as a sign that we are slaves. Rather, the Creator did this in wonderful wisdom, making each body in a form most suitable to its environment.

When God created the first humans, they were naked and bare, without feathers or wool on their bodies to protect them against heat and cold. God gave them the fruit of the trees for sustenance and the humans covered their naked bodies with the leaves of the

trees. And since trees stand tall, the Creator accordingly made people upright in order to make it easier for them to pick fruit to eat and leaves with which to clothe themselves.

Similarly, because God gave the grass of the earth and the greenery of the field to us as food, the Creator made us walk on all fours in order for us to graze more easily on the land. Put otherwise, if we were upright, it would be difficult for us to bend over all the time to eat. If height demonstrates lordliness and lowliness servitude, then wouldn't the trees be everyone's master and all of us their servants? It is utter nonsense!"

But Ga'avah retorted: "How can you say that you have perfectly proportioned forms? Look: the camel has a big body, a long neck, small ears and a short tail. Or consider the elephant, with its long trunk and large ears but small eyes. Or cattle—long tails and horns, but no upper teeth. On the one hand, sheep have big horns and a fat tail, but no beard; while, on the other hand, the goat has a long beard, but no fat tail to cover its nakedness. Or look at the rabbit: a little body with big ears. And so it is with the majority of animals and birds and creeping, crawling things—they all lack proportion!"

"You call yourself a sage," interrupted Mule, "yet you don't even understand the basics! You are ignorant, and furthermore you have no manners. Don't you know the saying: 'One who puts another to shame is himself shamed.' You deny that we are all equally works of the Creator. God formed us all as we are for a specific reason and made each of us in a particular shape to give each species a specific advantage. No one can calculate all these except the One who created us all. You do not have the Creator's vision."

Zadone sneered at the mule: "I didn't claim to have the Creator's vision. But tell me. How does a long neck benefit a camel?"

Mule smiled: "Notice that the length of its neck corresponds to the length of its body, so that it can pick up grass from the earth yet maintain its balance. It also enables the camel to extend its mouth to every place on its body in order to scratch itself. Similarly, the trunk of the elephant compensates for the shortness of its neck. And

its ears drive away flies and gnats from its eyes and especially from its mouth, which is always open because of the tusks. And the tusks were made to serve as weapons. Then again, to compensate for its being thin-skinned and tiny, the ears of the rabbit are large so that it can hear the slightest sounds around it, and thus its hearing provides an extra sensitivity to and awareness of its environment beyond all of ours. And so it is with every living creature. God made us all with the limbs and parts that are most beneficial to us and that keep us safe from harm."

Cow horned in: "The fact that you, human, think you have a more beautiful form than us is no proof that you are lords over us or that we are your slaves. Our males and our females are as pleasant in each other's eyes as yours are to each other, and they are attracted to each other just as yours are. So you cannot glorify yourself over us as being more beautiful in form. Beauty of form is in the eye of the beholder."

As soon as she finished speaking, Ox added: "The gifts of the Creator are many and precious. One cannot find them all in any one creature. Rather, they are spread among all living creatures. Some may appear to have more advantages, some less, but none is perfect. The only complete and perfectly whole being is the Creator. So, in truth, we all are divinely made but, although you humans are given very honorable gifts as your portion, you are not content and must exalt yourselves over other living creatures, diminishing us and exploiting us whenever you can. What does this say about you?"

IV

When Bersaf the King heard these words, he turned to the people and said: "The arguments made by the beasts are convincing. Can you refute their claims? If so, speak."

Zadone replied: "Yes, my lord. Let me begin by saying that it grieves me to hear such anger and resentment from these animals. Why, we love and cherish these creatures because they are our dearest

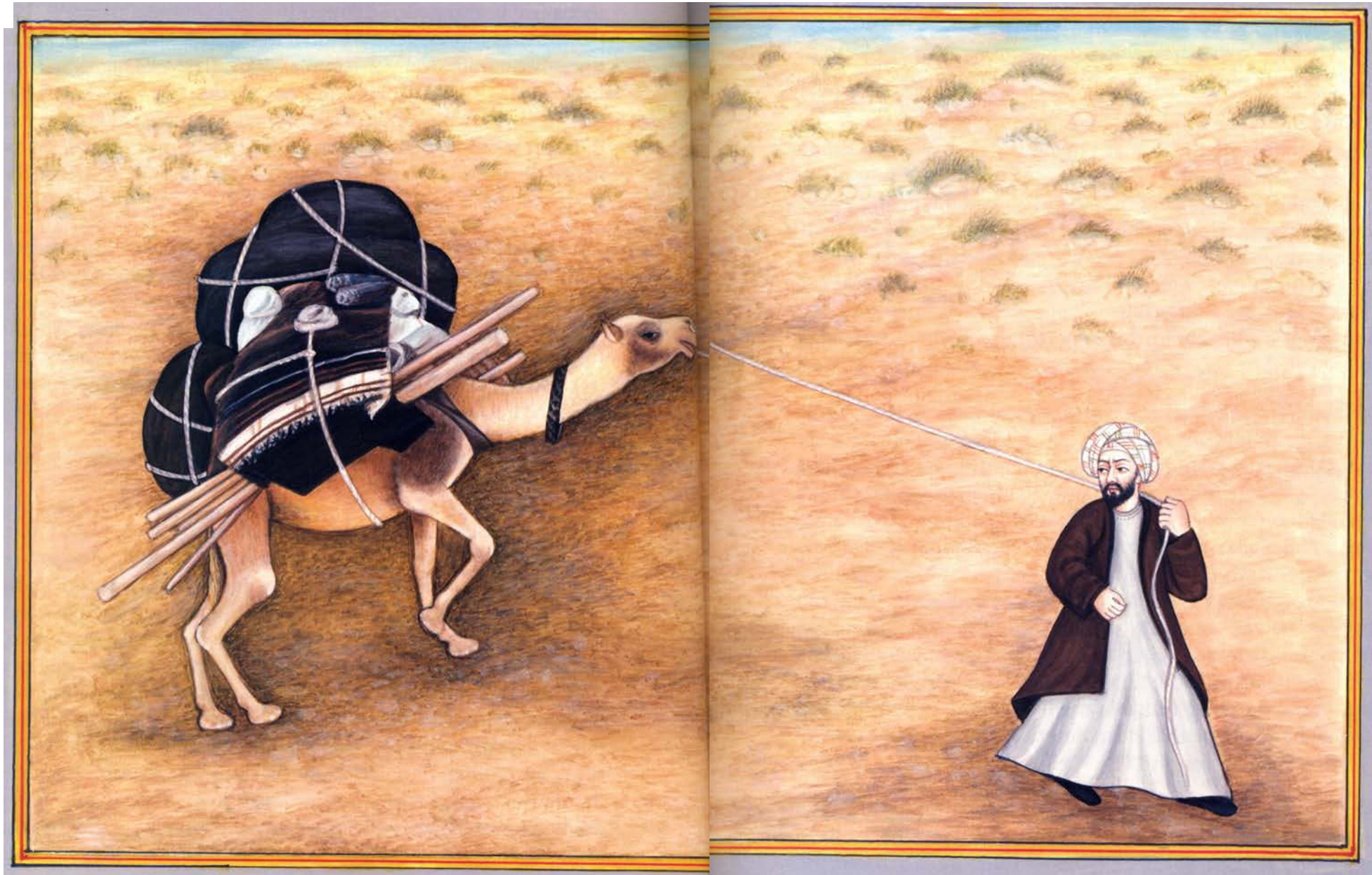
possessions. We raise them, house them and feed them. We protect them from strangers, bad weather and animals of prey. We heal them when they're sick. We incur many expenses to help them when they are injured. Some we honor with ornaments, like horses, which we adorn with finery and embroidered dress. All this shows our love and graciousness toward them. We do all this because they represent the proper way for lords to treat their slaves. We never abuse these animals; they abuse us by being ungrateful for the love we give them."

Mule was dumbfounded at the arrogance and duplicity of the human's words. He didn't know what to say. His heart thumped in his throat, calling him to speak, and he blurted out with pleading eyes: "Do not believe him!...He lies! Do not believe him!" Surprised at his own audacity, Mule lowered his head and, with more humility (as befitting when addressing a judge or king) spoke clearly, "My Lord..."

The King scowled at Mule: "What did you say? Have you a proper response?"

Thinking quickly, Mule added: "I am sorry to cry out. Please forgive me. But this person lies, which makes the pains they inflict upon us hurt even more. Do not believe what this man said about feeding, watering and sheltering us out of loving compassion. God forbid! It is not so! Oh...I am sorry to yell, please just try to understand our situation. Humans do these good things only because they fear that our worth will diminish. They do these things only in order to gain great benefit from us—drinking our milk, shearing our wool, riding on our backs, putting loads on us, stripping our skins for leather, and eating the flesh of our young. In the end of the matter, a cup of cruelty has been given us to drink. They certainly do not act from compassion and mercy as this human has argued."

At this, Mule was unable to restrain himself from weeping, and he cried loud and long until he could not utter another sound. His heart sank to the pit of his belly, and his mind was lost in a whirlwind of grief that, it seemed to him, none felt but he. However,



Camel spit and sputtered: "If you could see us, our Lord and King, with our nostrils pierced through with rings of iron and how they pull us by these rings causing us great pain. If you could see how they lead us in darkness through dry and desolate lands, and how we return lame,

our backs raw and aching from the friction of the heavy loads, faint with hunger, at the end of our strength—why you would cry out: 'Where is this compassion which these humans claim to have?!' Look upon us, our lord and King, and judge!"

many of his sisters and brothers cried with him, for they also knew all too well of the pain he communicated. And this eased his suffering a bit.

"Brother," brayed Donkey, "Let me take over now, you spoke your piece well, my friend. My Lord and King, it is true that, like slaves, we are acquired by them and sold by them. But so too are the Persians by the Romans and the Romans by the Persians; and the Ethiopians by the Turks and the Turks by the Ethiopians. How many peoples have taken slaves of another? And how many peoples have been taken as slaves? How can anyone prove which of them truly are lords and which are slaves? At any one time, this one governs the other, and at another time it is reversed—it is just a matter of power. So it is with us. Today we may be ruled by humankind, but God alone knows what tomorrow may bring. Perhaps someday they shall be ruled by us.

Alas, righteous King, if only you could see how we are fettered by human hands, and how our spines are crushed under the weight of packs, rocks and bricks, dirt and iron, and anything else that they deem necessary for their existence! They load us up with so much that we break down under our burdens. The last thing I feel before I go to sleep is the sharp pain in my back from the labor they impose upon me. But that is not all. Their young and old come after us with goads or sticks and hit us on our faces and backs. It is fun for them, and they laugh at us. We have no choice but to accept their cruelty; we are left to suffer alone with no one to understand our sorrows. If you saw these things, you would be moved to pity for us and you would cry out: 'Is there a decent human among them?! Is there any one with a clean heart?! Where is this compassion they pride themselves on?!'"

Turning to the other animals, Donkey urged their support: "Come, brothers and sisters, speak up and tell this court what the humans do to your kind."

And one by one each beast stepped forward with its own tale of woe.

Ox lumbered to the front and snorted: "If you could see us, our Lord and King, bound by rope to a yoke and between our shoulders the harness of a plough; how they compel us with whips and chains beyond the limits of our endurance to plough their land and to thresh their grain—and we with our mouths all bridled and muzzled—then your mercies would be so aroused you would exclaim: 'Human compassion is nothing but a fraud!'"

Camel spit and sputtered: "If you could see us, our Lord and King, with our nostrils pierced through with rings of iron and how they pull us by these rings causing us great pain. If you could see how they lead us in darkness through dry and desolate lands, and how we return lame, our backs raw and aching from the friction of the heavy loads, faint with hunger, at the end of our strength—why you would cry out: 'Where is this compassion which these humans claim to have?!' Look upon us, our lord and King, and judge!"

Then Elephant sadly trumpeted: "If you could see us hobbled by leg irons, with yokes of iron choking our necks, being beaten on the face and head by chains or whips or staves to steer us one way or another against our will—you would cry out with a bitter soul."

And Horse whinnied: "If you could see us forced into their battles with bridles in our mouths, girdles girding our loins, saddles on our backs and cinches around our bellies; how they dress us in coats of mail and arm us with weapons; and how they stab us with spurs and drive us on to face their enemies. If you could see how their weapons pierce us over and over again until we die or, if lucky, we limp homeward wounded and covered in blood—cry over us, our King, and pour forth your mercy on this, our sorrow! We need your help..."

Sheep jumped in, adding: "If you could see with your own eyes, our Lord and King, how they steal our infants and young, separating mother from child in order to drink our milk; and how they bind up the legs of our children and carry them away to be killed; how our young are beaten and left hungry and thirsty, crying and moaning in suffocating fear. If you could see how we are slaughtered and our skins stripped away and our bodies cut open..."

Then in their markets, there are merchants selling meat cooked in pots, meat roasted on spits, meat baked in ovens or fried in pans—why that's us! It's our bodies they're cooking and selling! So where is the mercy and compassion which these humans contend they show us? Go and consider, O righteous King, what they do even now!"

Finally, Mule composed himself enough to utter his own tale of woe: "If you could see, our Lord, how the humans hit us, back and front, with sticks and hard staves, and how they insult and curse us with their foul mouths—if you consider, our Lord and King, how much they resemble in character the disgraceful ugliness of their words, then you would see how far removed these humans are from their supposed ideal."

Mule turned to the humans, feeling strength rising from his belly to fuel his words: "These humans fool even themselves!" He turned back to the King, "They do not follow God's commandments; they are not corrected by the rebukes of their prophets—they are incorrigible! Judge them. Judge them for their arrogance, for their violence, and for their cruelty! Judge them with eyes of justice."

As Mule finished speaking, all the cloven hoofed animals roared and cried out as if with one voice: "HAVE MERCY UPON US, our Lord and King! SAVE US FROM THE HAND OF THESE CRUEL AND OPPRESSIVE HUMANS!"

King Bersaf was deeply moved by their plea but, seeking confirmation of his feelings, he turned to his sages and sought their counsel.

"Our Lord and King," they each replied one after another, "Everything these beasts have said is true and there are many witnesses to their mistreatment at human hands."

Hearing this, the King grew increasingly purple with rage, but he calmed himself, regained his composure, and commanded: "Go to your dwellings and sleep, each human and animal in his or her own place. Return tomorrow before me and I will continue to hear arguments in this case."

GATE TWO

The consultations of the King with his ministers, sages and judges; of the humans by themselves; and of the animals by themselves

I

That night, the King arose and wandered in his garden with his teacher, Peruz, an enlightened spirit and a brilliant philosopher. The King said to him: "You've heard the entire lawsuit so far—what is your advice in this matter?"

Peruz responded: "If it pleases my Lord, my advice is for the King to command that all the judges and wise ones of the spirits be assembled in this court so that he may consult with them on this matter. This is a profound case with much dependent on its outcome. We are making a decision here, not only for our domain, but ultimately for animals and humans the world over."

The King nodded: "Your advice is good. As you have advised, so shall it be."

So the King's message was sent throughout the kingdom to bring the spirit judges, sages, logicians and philosophers from the spirit tribes of Na'ahid, Baharam, Babakan, Balakiss and Adariss to come to sit before their King. And so they did. And when all were gathered in the palace, he said to them: "You've heard, no doubt, of the animals' complaint about the violence done them by the humans. Behold—they take refuge in our shadow and trust in our government. What do you advise us to do?"

The chief sage from Na'ahid answered: "My advice is that the King command the animals to write a brief detailing their complaint against the humans and that this letter be read in court. Then the

THE ANIMALS' LAWSUIT AGAINST HUMANITY



So the King's message was sent throughout the kingdom to bring the spirit judges, sages, logicians and philosophers from the spirit tribes.

judges shall judge the case to determine how the animals are to be set free. Consequently, if the humans don't do what the judges order them to do and the animals flee from them, then the humans will be the guilty ones and the animals will be absolved from any wrongdoing in fleeing."

Then the King asked the gathering: "What do you think?"

They all responded that his advice was sound; all except the sage from Baharam, who queried: "Don't you think that the humans are entitled to some compensation? Perhaps the animals should be purchased from the humans and then set free? Then the humans would be more inclined to obey the verdict."

"Yes," some answered, "that could be a good solution."

"Then who should pay the price?"

"Our Lord and King," replied the wise ones without hesitation.

So the sage asked: "Where will the King get the money?"

"From the Spirits' Treasury," they replied, again without hesitation.

The sage spoke up with a calm voice, "There isn't enough money in the House of the Spirits to pay the price of all these animals. And most humans would not want to sell the animals at any price—they use the animals to help them, they depend upon the animals for their current way of life. Kings and princes ride them and farmers use them for work in the field. They need them for food and clothing. Their minds will not change on this matter because money is not the object. There is no possibility that the animals' freedom can simply be purchased."

The King asked: "So what is your best advice?"

He replied: "I think that the King should command the captive animals to agree in secret to flee, altogether on one night, and get out from under human thumbs just as the animals of the wilderness have done. Then, when the humans awake in the morning,

they won't find any creature on which to ride or with which to carry their loads. This will be the salvation of the animals from the yoke of the humans! Maybe then they will understand how much they need the animals. Maybe then they will treat them with respect."

But the leader of the sages from Babakan sourly countered: "In my opinion, this idea won't work. It will be most difficult to carry out because these animals are restrained with ropes and iron chains on their legs and shoulders at night. So how will all be able to flee during the night?"

The Master of Oaths and Incantations responded: "Let the King send bands of spirits to open the animals' bonds and loosen their bindings and transport them far away from the humans."

Turning to the King, he added: "Know, my master, that this deed would gain us great merit in the eyes of the animals and before God, as we are taught: 'Know, you King, that you are not set to rule in order to acquire wealth by collecting silver and gold, but to pay attention to the cry of the oppressed.' You have a moral obligation here, your Highness."

But the philosopher from Adariss rejected this, saying: "This flowery deed will not guarantee the outcome we desire nor will it fix what is broken. Don't you see what will happen if we deliver these animals from human bondage? Won't the humans wake up the next morning and realize that the flight of the animals altogether in one night was the work of the spirits? And when they realize that the spirits are the cause of this situation, don't you think that a hot anger will arise in their hearts and a great hatred will develop among the humans against us spirits?"

And the assembly agreed in collective recognition.

The philosopher continued, his vision seeing deep and clear: "My Lord, the King... My advice is not to pass judgment except after a complete and proper investigation of the entire matter. The King should sit in the Place of Judgment tomorrow, and the participants in the lawsuit should come before him, and the King should listen

to all the arguments until it becomes clear where justice resides and then he should judge between the two parties, carefully considering all the consequences of his decision."

The philosopher then looked deeply into the King's bright eyes, and saw radiating in them a noble heart. His face warmed in admiration and he said. "A wise spirit is aware of all the possible paths and strives to choose the one that is most in accordance with God's Will. This should become clearer to us with our work and patience and, with God's Grace, we will render a just and right verdict."

But the Master of Oaths and Incantations interrupted him and, after respectfully acknowledging this truth, he asked some sober and deeply concerned questions: "Have you ever seen animals get the better of humans in a dispute? Don't humans have the advantage in speaking and presenting their views? Just look at the poor animals—should they bear this yoke forever?"

The discussion went on all night, but in the end, all agreed that the philosopher from Adariss had suggested the best path to follow.

II

While the King was occupied with his sages, the humans also gathered in a secret assembly.

Ka'as opened the meeting: "We all saw what happened today! Do any of you have any doubt about the King's inclination in this matter or how he will judge us? I'll tell you what I think. I think we've got a serious problem on our hands, and words won't solve it! Words are empty, action is what speaks!"

Ahzar and Unf shouted: "Hear, Hear!"

The wise woman, Hochmah spoke up, gently but firmly: "I think that this case can only result in one of three verdicts. One, they might rule to set the animals free from our enslavement without

compensation to us. Two, we may be forced to sell them for some price. Or three, we may have to ease their yokes and improve their lot. These are the only alternatives."

Some laughed and some snickered. But Zadone sneered: "And do you know which of the three the King will choose?"

Hochmah responded mildly: "If you truly want my opinion, I will not lie to you. I think that the King will reason: 'The animals came to our court to hide under our wing; they trusted in our rule yet even here they were oppressed. Therefore we must save them from the violence done to them.' That's what he will think. So, friends, I am certain that we cannot win this case based on keeping things as they are. We should think creatively and plan for alternatives."

Concerned, one person blurted out: "But if the King judges that the beasts should be set free, what will we do? How will we survive?" The room erupted in conversation, voices rising in the crowd.

"We'll die."

"We don't need them!"

"It is our right!"

"What about our needs?"

Unfjumped up, looking at Hochmah with contempt, and then spoke above the crowd: "We must hold to our original story: 'They are our slaves and our possessions for all eternity; they are our inheritance from our parents and our ancestors, by divine right. We cannot just let them go. It wouldn't be right. Why, we'd be rewarding rebellion!'"

"We can't let that happen," added Zadone, "We must keep our way of life. If we're asked for proof of ownership, we can simply say that the documents were lost in the Flood during Noah's time. They'll have to believe us."

But another person worried: "But if the King decides that we should sell them, what will we do?"

A city-dweller responded: "Well then, we shall sell them at a good rate and make a decent profit from them."

But a country-dweller exclaimed: "We'll all die if we are forced to free the animals, so don't even think about doing this!"

The city-dwellers were perplexed and astonished by this response and asked why. The peasant answered: "Without milk to drink and meat to eat, without wool clothes or skins to cover us, without hides to make tents, without shoes and sandals on our feet, and without skins in which to put water—why we would be naked and bare, hungry and thirsty! Indeed, death would be better than life in this case!"

And don't think it is only our problem. What happens to us will ultimately happen to you city folk. Just remember where all your foods and fineries come from. So—we mustn't sell them or send them away—let's not even talk about this anymore! Instead let's improve things and make the world a little easier for them—just as Hochmah said. We should lessen the animals' toil and not work them so hard, for they are flesh and blood like us—they feel pain as we do. In this way, we will avert God's punishment, for the Creator gave them into our hands and we don't want to be found sinning. We're only hurting ourselves."

Hochmah nodded her approval as the man spoke and many other people also murmured their agreement. Ka'as glared at them all and Zadone walked towards the peasant until he stood right in his face. Then he sneered sarcastically: "Are you really so stupid? There must be a better alternative than this! It would be ridiculous for lords to treat slaves in such a manner! They must know their place. Don't look away from me! Look into my eyes. You see that I am right. Ha! You can't even look at me. You know I'm right."

"No. But I am beginning to think that violence is not the way of life that God intended for us, and that it will always come back to haunt us as long as we depend upon it for our survival. We can't rule with violence"

"Ha! You fool! What do you know? You're a peasant! You depend upon our power for your survival. Just listen to this man! HA!"

Ahzar, Unf, and their gang broke into harsh laughter, and others supported them by pounding their clubs, sticks and feet on the floor, dissolving the meeting with their unspoken tactics. But, even though the meeting adjourned with Zadone still in charge, a distinct division in the human tent was beginning to emerge.

III

That same evening, the animals also gathered in seclusion to take counsel together.

Horse was puzzled. "Considering all the hardships that have befallen us, how is it that the Court didn't rule immediately in our favor?"

Ox snorted: "Perhaps tomorrow we should return and utter an even greater and more bitter cry—maybe then the King will have mercy on us and cut our bonds—for it's clear that his compassion already has been aroused."

Elephant rumbled: "I worry that tomorrow one of the humans will be able to press their advantage by using eloquent words. Humans can be infinitely deceitful. We should come up with a plan so that the humans can't trick the judges. We need to show the Spirit King the full extent of the problem we animals face."

Mule agreed: "I think we ought to send emissaries to all of the other animal species on the island, and ask them to join us in this lawsuit. For it isn't against us alone that the humans do evil, but by extension against all species of creatures. We need the other species to unite with us. They can help us by sending the best representatives they have to stand with us. In this way we'll receive much good advice and be able to offer more effective arguments. Don't forget: 'As helpers multiply, success increases.' We are in this together; our voices must unite for the ears of justice to hear."

Those present were all of one mind, so they sent six emissaries to the rulers of the six classes of animals that were not already represented by the beasts with the cloven hoofs, which constitute the seventh species. The first emissary was Horse, who went to Lion, ruler of the carnivores, the predatory animals. The second was Ox, who went to Phoenix, ruler of the non-predatory birds. Next was Sheep, who went to Osprey, ruler of the birds of prey. Then came Donkey, who went to Bee, ruler of the winged swarming things. The fifth emissary was Pig, who went to Sea Dragon, ruler of the water creatures. And last was Mule, who went to Snake, ruler of the creeping things.

GATE THREE

The beasts send emissaries to the other species to ask for help in their lawsuit against the humans

I

Horse, the first emissary, galloped for several hours until he reached the green, grassy domain of Lion, king of the carnivorous animals. The mighty monarch, unaware of what had transpired elsewhere on the island, was lounging by a watering hole, surrounded by a pack of lionesses. Sniffing the air, they all looked up with interest as Horse appeared. He spoke from a prudent distance, relating to all of them what had happened, then drawing closer he added: "They have sent me to you, O king of beasts, to ask that you send an advocate to stand with us in this lawsuit."

Lion shook his mane, scowled and growled out: "What are the humans arguing?"

"They say that we are their slaves and property; that they are masters over us and over all other species of animals on the face of the earth."

Lion's growl turned to a roar: "And in what do the humans glorify themselves that they consider themselves to be our masters? They are weak, throw a human into a ring with me and see what happens. Are they greater in strength or power? No. Or in girth of body or bulk of limbs? No. In jumping or running, or in natural weaponry? No! Let them feel my teeth penetrate their skin as I snack on their salty flesh. They shall watch me as I eat them alive. Let them stand in battle with my kind and see what happens. Behold, if they glorify themselves as our masters, and demonize us as their slaves, I will gather my forces and fall upon them suddenly.

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And Lion began to slash the air with his talons and gnash his teeth in fury....Quivering from head to hoof, Horse whimpered: "By my life, your majesty, there are humans who glorify themselves in all ways above us. But they are too clever to rely solely on their own strength." When Lion heard the words of the emissary, he stood dumbstruck for a while, then he commanded that word be spread throughout his kingdom that all his forces should gather before him: all the meat-eaters with incisors and talons—tigers and wolves, polecats and jackals, bears and foxes, wildcats, hyenas, and more.

We will tear apart their ranks and teach them what power really is!" And Lion began to slash the air with his talons and gnash his teeth in fury.

Quivering from head to hoof, Horse whimpered: "By my life, your majesty, there are humans who glorify themselves in all ways above us. But they are too clever to rely solely on their own strength." The Lion king stopped his display and listened with concerned curiosity.

"They make swords and spears, knives and hooks, slings and bows. And they have unusual clothes—coats of mail and iron shoes and copper girdles. The sharp teeth of young lions won't be able to grab hold of them, nor will the teeth of a tiger be able to gash them. You carnivores don't know the depth of human cunning. But the dispute before the King and his ministers is not based on strength; rather it is based on argument and other demonstrations of wisdom."

When Lion heard the words of the emissary, he stood dumbstruck for a while, then he commanded that word be spread throughout his kingdom that all his forces should gather before him: all the meat-eaters with incisors and talons—tigers and wolves, polecats and jackals, bears and foxes, wildcats, hyenas, and more. The king made known to them the story of the emissary, adding: "Now who will be the one to go and speak in our name, to return home to great honor? Who will defend us, not with violence, but with words expressing our right to life? We will help provide him with everything he needs to say."

But all those assembled were struck silent because they feared in their hearts that there was none among them worthy of the task.

Tiger said: "My master the king, if the matter were to be decided by leaping and killing in a single bound—behold, I'd be good for that."

Wolf said: "If it depended on coming in stealth to steal sheep and cattle, then I'd be the obvious choice."

Bear said: "If the matter only had to do with making ambushes in narrow places, then I'd do it."

Lion king looked expectantly to Horse, but the horse shook his head firmly from side to side.

Cat said: "If it were a matter of pretending modesty and meekness, of lying in their midst with shut eyes and appearing to doze while my heart is alert—behold I'd be perfect."

Dog said: "If it were a matter of servile flattery, of wagging the tail and following after them expectantly, then I could certainly do the job."

But the king said sadly: "You are all fine warriors. I'm sorry, but I can't pick any of you because the problem requires other skills. We need someone who is wise and articulate, not just strong." The king began to roar in despair.

After some thought, Tiger spoke up: "Sire, I think that there is none as understanding and wise and good as Dragon."

All those assembled howled and roared their agreement, so Lion called for Dragon and said: "For the honor of our species, go and represent us. Be careful with your words and return with justice served. We are depending on you in trust."

The king helped him with what to say, and sent him on his way in the company of Horse.

II

The kingdom of the non-predatory birds extended throughout the island, but its king, Phoenix, dwelt in the desert. Ox, the second emissary, lumbered along for half the night before reaching the court. By the time he arrived, word had already reached the kingdom and Phoenix had already gathered flocks of all the non-predatory birds

to his side. There they hopped and fluttered, covering the rocky desert floor in numbers so great it was impossible to count them. Ox looked upon the sea of birds, and told them about the plan.

Phoenix, the king, turned to Peacock, his advisor, and asked: "Whom do we have who would be a worthy spokes-bird?"

Stretching his tail feathers in agitation, Peacock hedged: "My lord, our kinds are so numerous! I don't even know where to begin!"

Phoenix snapped: "Just begin, you peacock!"

So Peacock began strutting about, reciting: "Lapwing, the spy, is friend and beloved of Solomon the King, the son of David. He dresses in many colors and wears a mantle on his head and shakes it as if praying. It was he who first told Solomon about the Queen of Sheba. Then there's Rooster who calls to prayer. He is the one who stands on a wall with a red waddle on his head like a crown, and with red eyes. He spreads his wings and makes his tail stand up like a flag. He knows the times of prayer and awakens the humans to their duties. Now Lark is an advisor and advocate. At midday she gives advice, acting like a preacher on the pulpit.

And then there is Thrush, the imitator, who stands on a branch of a fruit tree. She is small of body, quick of movement and white of cheek, with darting eyes and a clear and pleasant voice. She dwells with humans in their orchards and mixes with them in their homes. She answers to all who call and imitates tunes and chirps. Raven, on the other hand, makes prophecies. He is the one dressed in black, zealous in his lamentations every dawn. He goes everywhere because he is strong winged. He walks down distant roads and roams the far places, tells futures, announces hidden things, and says in his cry: 'Beware! Visions! Danger, danger!...'

"Stop!" interrupted Phoenix, "Just tell me who, in your eyes, is most worthy to represent our species in the lawsuit with the humans?"



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And Peacock responded: "All are proper and right for this, because all are fluent, poetic and masters of language, but Nightingale is a master both of tongues and tunes—she is the one who stands on the branch of a tree, tiny of body, easy of movement and good of song. Send Nightingale, for there is none like her in your domain."

And the Phoenix turned to Nightingale and said, "Go and speak as boldly as inspiration speaks to you!" And she flew off as commanded, leaving Ox to lumber after her as fast as he could.

III

Meanwhile, the third emissary, Sheep, was sent to the seashore, to meet Osprey, queen of the birds of prey, dwelling high atop a rocky, wind-lashed promontory. Osprey is a bird so great in size that she could have grasped the sheep in one talon and easily lifted both herself and her prey skyward. And she and the sheep both knew it. Nonetheless, Sheep summoned up all her courage to stand before her. The queen listened to the sheep with a pensive scowl. And with a strong call, all the birds of prey appeared in seconds in response to their queen's command. The air was filled with all sorts of predatory birds: eagles and vultures, owls and bustards, falcons and hawks and buzzards, and more besides.

Then Queen Osprey told them all that the emissary had told her, adding: "You have heard, families of hunting birds, about the trouble which the humans have brought upon us in their self-aggrandizement over all other living creatures! Until this matter came up we have managed to keep ourselves far removed from them, seeking peace and security far from their evil. And yet despite all this, it has not saved us because now we must go to court to defend our rights. But do not despair—God pays all according to their deeds."

The queen continued: "To think how I've helped those uncaring creatures over the years! How many ships have I saved by sending them in the right direction! How many boats sank while I helped the survivors reach dry land! Why do I do these things? I'll tell you

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How many boats sank while I helped the survivors reach dry land! Why do I do these things? I'll tell you why—I do them as a way of honoring God for having given me such a great and strong body!" The queen broke off her brooding in agitation.